Horticulture Tips
May 2006

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
Oklahoma State University

GARDEN TIPS FOR MAY!

David Hillock

Trees and Shrubs

- Prune and feed azaleas immediately after blooming.
- Insect Alert: (F-7306)
  - Bagworms on juniper and arborvitae. (Late May)
  - Elm leaf beetles and larvae on elms. (Late May)
  - Mimosa webworms on mimosa and honeylocust.
  - Lace bugs on sycamore, pyrancantha and azalea.
- Soak new transplants and newly planted trees unless rainfall is abundant.
- Pine needle disease treatments are needed in mid-May. (F-7618)

Turfgrass

- Cool-season lawns can be fertilized again. If you did not fertilize cool-season grasses in March and April, do so now.
- Warm-season lawns may be fertilized again in May. (F-6420)
- Seeding of warm-season grasses such as bermudagrass, buffalograss, zoysiagrass and centipedegrass is best performed in mid-May through the end of June. The soil temperatures are warm enough for germination and adequate growing season is present to promote winter hardiness.
- Dollar spot disease of lawns can first become visible in mid-May. Make certain fertilizer applications have been adequate before ever applying a fungicide. (F-7658)
- Nutsedge plants become visible during this month. Post-emergent treatments are best applied for the first time this month (F-6421). Make certain warm-season grasses have completed green-up.
- The second application of pre-emergent annual grass herbicides can be applied in late-May or early June, depending upon timing of first application (F-6421). Check label for details.
- Vegetative establishment of warm-season grasses can continue. (F-6419)

Flowers

- Annual bedding plants can be set out for summer color.
- Plant summer bulbs such as cannas, dahlias, elephant ear, caladiums and gladiolus.
- Shake a leaf over white paper to look for spider mites. If the tiny specks begin to crawl, mites are present.

Water Gardens

- Clean out water garden and prepare for season. Divide and repot water garden plants.
- Begin feeding fish when water temperatures are over 50°F.

Fruits and Vegetables

- Plant watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumber, eggplant, okra, sweet potatoes, etc.
- Fruit spray programs should be faithfully continued during the next several weeks. (F 6235).
- Late May is the best time to control borers in the orchard. Check for label recommendations and controls.

Thrips can Reek Havoc on Flowers and Plant Foliage

David Hillock

A small insect present in great numbers that is causing problems in our garden right now is thrips. They have mouth parts like rasps which they use to scratch the surface of flowers, buds or young leaves and then lap up the plant juices. Their damage leaves many discolored or dead areas on the plant. They are small cylindrical shaped yellowish/orange insects with wings that sort of resemble feathers. They can't fly very well but move about in the wind. They only live about 40 days but can have up to 8 generations per year, so they can be present all through the growing season. Thrips may or may not do significant damage in the garden. They may only be present for a period and then blow away. However, they can do enough damage to warrant control. Insecticidal soaps are a good means of treatment. Other labeled chemicals are Orthene and Neem oil. Sprays may need to be applied 2 to 3 times at 7 day intervals. Thrips have a number of natural enemies as well. Damsel Bugs, Pirate Bugs and Lacewing Larvae feed on thrips.

What are the Horizontal Holes on My Trees?

David Hillock

Sap suckers, a close relative of woodpeckers, cause damage to trees that is often attributed to wood boring insects. They visit a tree many times, feeding on sap accumulated in the holes they have drilled. Sap sucker damage appears as rows of holes circling or running vertically on the trunk or larger limbs of the tree. This contrasts with emergence holes of borers that occur in a random pattern on the trunk or in limbs of a tree. Contrary to popular belief, these birds rarely, if ever, dig through bark to capture wood-boring insects, but rather feed on cambium and sap in the phloem. The tree species most commonly attacked by sap suckers are pine, sugar maple, birch, willow, magnolia, apple and pecan.

In Oklahoma, the yellow-bellied sap sucker is the most common species that damages trees. They winter in the South and spend the summer in the northern part of the United States. Thus, they often cause damage during their migrations in the spring through early summer, and again in fall in Oklahoma.

Control

Woodpeckers are classified as migratory, non-game birds and are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, so killing them is usually out of the question. To protect trees from sapsuckers, wrap barriers of 1/4-inch (0.6-cm) hardware cloth, plastic mesh or burlap around injured areas to discourage further damage. This method may be practical for protecting high-

value ornamental or shade trees. In orchards and forested areas it may be best to let the sapsuckers work on one or more of their favorite trees. Discouraging them from select trees may encourage the birds to disperse to others, causing damage to a greater number of trees.

Frightening Devices

Visual. Stationary model hawks or owls, fake and simulated snakes, and owl and cat silhouettes are generally considered ineffective as repellents. Toy plastic twirlers or windmills fastened to the eaves, and aluminum foil or brightly colored plastic strips, bright tin lids, and pie pans hung from above, all of which repel by movement and/or reflection, have been used with some success, as have suspended falcon silhouettes, especially if put in place soon after the damage starts. The twirlers and plastic strips rely on a breeze for motion. Large rubber balloons with owl-like eyes painted on them are included in the recent array of frightening devices used to scare woodpeckers. A good deal of attention has recently been given to round magnifying-type shaving mirrors installed over or adjacent to damaged areas to frighten woodpeckers with their larger-than life reflections. Success is sometimes reported by those using the method and this encourages further testing.

Sound. Loud noises such as handclapping, a toy cap pistol and banging on a garbage can lid have been used to frighten woodpeckers away from houses. Such harassment, if repeated when the bird returns, may cause it to leave for good. Propane exploders (gas cannons) or other commercial noise-producing, frightening devices may have some merit for scaring woodpeckers from commercial orchards, at least for short periods. Because of the noise they produce, they are rarely acceptable near inhabited dwellings or residential areas. Around homes, portable radios have been played with little success in discouraging woodpeckers. Expensive high-frequency sound-producing devices are marketed for controlling various pest birds but rarely provide advertised results. High-frequency sound is above the normal audible hearing range of humans but, unfortunately, above the range of most birds too. Woodpeckers can be very persistent and are not easily driven from their territories or selected pecking sites. For this reason, visual or sound types of frightening devices for protecting buildings — if they are to be effective at all — should be employed as soon as the problem is identified and before territories are well established. Visual and sound devices often fail to give desired results and netting may have to be installed.

Repellents

Taste. Many chemicals that have objectionable tastes as well as odors have been tested for treating utility poles and fence posts to discourage woodpeckers. Most have proven ineffective or at least not cost-effective.

Odor. Odors such as from naphthalene (mothballs) and wood treatments, such as creosote and pentachlorophenol, are of doubtful merit and do not resolve the woodpecker problem.

Tactile. Sticky or tacky bird repellents such as Tanglefoot®, 4-The-Birds®, and Roost-No-More®, smeared or placed in wavy bands with a caulking gun on limbs or trunks where sapsuckers are working, will often discourage the birds from orchard, ornamental and shade trees. These same repellents can be effective in discouraging birds if applied to wood siding and other areas of structural damage. A word of caution: some of the sticky bird repellents will

discolor painted, stained or natural wood siding. Others may run in warm weather, leaving unsightly streaks. It is best to try out the material on a small out-of-sight area first before applying it extensively. The tacky repellents can be applied to a thin piece of pressed board, ridged clear plastic sheets, or other suitable material, which is then fastened to the area where damage is occurring.

Trapping
Live traps have been tried in attempts to capture woodpeckers for possible relocation rather than killing the birds. None of those explored were very successful, and more research is needed to develop an effective woodpecker live trap.

Fire Blight: Pros and Cons of removal during the growing season

Eric T. Stafne

Fire Blight (*Erwinia amylovora*) is a devastating bacterial disease that affects many plants, but especially apples and pears. Being a bacterium, a wounded area is needed for infection. Unlike fungal pathogens, bacteria cannot penetrate the host on their own. Fire blight occurs early in the year during warm and humid weather. Young, succulent growth is very susceptible to this disease. Cultural practices such as proper pruning, correct fertilization and site selection can help to minimize fire blight. Pruning during the dormant season is the preferred time; however, if an infection is severe in the spring, then measures need to be taken. If steps are not taken to remove some of the blighted areas of the tree, then fast-spreading infections can seriously harm the tree and rootstock. The Catch-22 about pruning during the growing season is that it may spread the disease even more! If the infection is light and isolated, it is appropriate to prune out the infected branches. But, if the infection is widespread, cutting may not help much. Heavy pruning done during the growing season will generate new, succulent growth for the blight to attack. Young trees are especially at risk, therefore scouting for the disease early in the season and subsequent removal of infected areas are necessary. If the bacterium gets into the rootstock it can kill the tree, especially young trees up to 7 years old. Pruning of fire blight infected shoots should never be done during wet conditions, including heavy dews. Any free-flowing water can wash the bacteria from an infected site to a fresh pruning wound. Sanitation of pruning equipment is very important to control fire blight. Pruning equipment should be sterilized in a 10% bleach solution for one minute between cuts. Using a pair of pruners will help speed up the process. Pruning during the dormant season doesn't require any sterilization. Also, do not leave winter prunings on the ground too long because they can be a source of inoculum once the weather warms up. When cutting during the growing season, be careful not to brush pruned branches against other parts of the tree if possible, as this can spread the disease as well.

The following links have lists of apples, apple rootstocks and pears and their susceptibilities to fire blight:
http://www.caf.wvu.edu/Kearneysville/tables/fbsus.html -- apples
http://www.caf.wvu.edu/Kearneysville/tables/fbrootsus.html -- apple rootstocks
http://www.caf.wvu.edu/Kearneysville/tables/pearfireblightsus.htm -- pears

Hydrangeas

David Hillock

We grow a few hydrangea species in our woodland garden at the *Oklahoma Gardening* Studio Gardens. The first one is Hydrangea Lime Light (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Lime Light'). It has huge cone-shaped pompom flower heads that open white, fade to lime green and finally display a deep pink as they age further. Lime light hydrangea can grow to 7-8 feet but is easily kept at around 4 feet. The species is native to Asia and is the hardiest of the hydrangeas surviving winters as far north as zone 3. The color of the flowers is not affected by soil pH and the blooms are produced on new season's growth.

The second hydrangea is Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*). This species is native to the states of Georgia, Florida and Mississippi and does well in Oklahoma. It is a former Oklahoma Proven selection with long drooping panicles of white flowers. These blooms can also take on different colors as they age. Oakleaf Hydrangea blooms on previous season's growth so it should only be pruned immediately after flowering or next year's developing flower buds may be removed. It grows best in shade or morning sun and requires an organic soil that doesn't stay dry for very long.

The final hydrangea is *Hydrangea* 'Endless Summer'. It is a fairly new introduction and a break through in hydrangea breeding. It is a large flowered variety that blooms on current season's growth. These plants can be cut back severely each spring to stay compact and still provide lots of color. There's no need to worry about the flower buds freezing during winter as well. The blooms of Endless Summer are dependent on soil pH. At low pH, or in acidic soils, the flowers will be blue. At high pH, or in alkaline soils like those of western Oklahoma, the flowers will be pink. It is the aluminum from acidic soils that provides the blue in the flower petals. Most nurseries that grow these plants have labels with a picture of a blue flower or a pink flower and some will treat the plants with aluminum sulfate before they ship them to the retailers.

Lane Agriculture Center Field Day

Jim Shrefler

Oklahoma State University and the USDA Agriculture Research Service at Lane, Oklahoma invite you to attend their Annual Field Day on Saturday, June 10, 2006. This event will provide opportunities to learn about new vegetable production methods and techniques for Oklahoma and surrounding areas, to see research projects on certified organic vegetable production methods and to join us for a day of food and entertainment. The event will begin at 9 a.m. and continue until 3 p.m. with fried catfish and watermelon served through the course of the day. For those interested in growing vegetables on the farm or in the home garden, there will be ample opportunity to learn about research being done on organic fertilizers, weed control for organic growing, variety selection, methods for growing transplants, and much more. Vegetables currently being studied include tomato, pepper, watermelon, sweet corn, southern peas, onions and summer squash. The Center now has vegetable production fields that are officially approved for Certified Organic Production. If you have considered pursuing this farming opportunity, this will be a chance to learn about the processes required to achieve this

status. The day's events will also include other topics of interest to southeast Oklahomans, fire ants being one of these. Seminars will be presented by Oklahoma State University fire ant experts on understanding the problem and knowing how to how to get it under control. On the entertainment side, you will be able to experience a part of rural heritage that will be provided by a display of antique tractors and competition in barrel rolling, slow racing and sled pulling. If you have an antique tractor, bring it along with you and join in these activities! For more information, call (580) 889-7343 or see the web site www.lane-ag.org. The Center is located 10 miles east of Atoka, Oklahoma on state Highway 3.

Master Gardener Corner

David Hillock

The 2006 Oklahoma Master Gardener Continued Training Summer Conference is just around the corner, May 18-19! Information regarding the conference can now be found at http://www.okstate.edu/ag/asnr/hortla/mgardener/mgconference.htm.

A preconference social will be held on Thursday, May 18 at Chadick Park in McAlester for those arriving early. Taste of Italy is the theme for the evening and we will be serving light Italian refreshments. There will also be tours of the wonderful gardens at the park. Be sure to check the box on the registration form if you plan to attend. Attendance to the preconference social is free, but we need to know how many are coming to plan accordingly.

Program and Registration packets should have arrived in your mailboxes a couple weeks ago. Conference registration will be $40.00. Hope to see you all there! To learn more about the conference contact David Hillock, Master Gardener Coordinator, Oklahoma State University, Dept. of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture, 360 Ag Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078. E-mail: david.hillock@okstate.edu; phone: 405-744-5158 or visit the above listed web site.

Upcoming Horticulture Events

- CANCELLED - Turf and Nursery Field Day
May 17, 2006, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater

State Master Gardener Continued Training Conference
May 19, 2006, McAlester, Oklahoma

Landscape IPM Workshop
May 31, 2006, OSU, Stillwater Campus

Workshop Topic - *Quality of Mulch Makes a Difference* - Landscapers should be wary of sour smelling mulch that can result in phytotoxicity to plants. Research has shown that by-products such as formaldehyde, methanol and acetic acid can be generated in stagnant mulch piles (not

properly aerated). For more information on the workshop, contact Mike Schnelle at 405-744-7361 or mike.schnelle@okstate.edu.

Oklahoma Gardening Summer Gardenfest
June 10, 2006, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater

Greenhouse Production Short Course
June 28-29, 2006, OSU-Oklahoma City
Contact Mike Schnelle at 405-744-7361 or mike.schnelle@okstate.edu.

Horticulture Therapy Conference
July 11, 2006, OSU, Stillwater Campus
Contact Mike Schnelle at 405-744-7361 or mike.schnelle@okstate.edu.

For more information about upcoming events, please contact Stephanie Larimer at 405-744-5404 or stephanie.larimer@okstate.edu.